

Mrs. Buchanan
3 Pages

ACT TWO

THE TENDERNESS OF A MOTHER

SCENE 1

The Buchanans'. We see John in pajamas seated on the floor, smoking before the fireplace; nothing else.

His mother, Mrs. Buchanan, enters the lighted area in her lace negligee.

Start

MRS. BUCHANAN. Son?

JOHN. Yes, Mother?

MRS. BUCHANAN. You mustn't misunderstand me about Miss Alma. Naturally I feel sorry for her, too. But, precious, precious! In every Southern town there's a girl or two like that. People feel sorry for them, they're kind to them, but, darling, they keep at a distance, they don't get involved with them. Especially not in a sentimental way.

JOHN. I don't know what you mean about Miss Alma. She's a little bit—quaint, she's very excitable, but—there's nothing *wrong* with her.

MRS. BUCHANAN. Precious, can't you see? Miss Alma is an *eccentric!*

JOHN. You mean she isn't like all the other girls in Glorious Hill?

MRS. BUCHANAN. There's always at least one like her in every Southern town, sometimes, like Miss Alma, rather sweet, sometimes even gifted, and I think that Miss Alma *does* have a rather appealing voice when she doesn't become too carried away by her singing. Sometimes, but not often, pretty. I have seen Miss Alma when she was almost pretty. But never, never *quite*.

JOHN. There are moments when she has beauty.

MRS. BUCHANAN. Those moments haven't occurred when I looked at her! Such a wide mouth she has, like the mouth of a clown! And she distorts her face with all those false expressions. However, Miss Alma's looks are beside the point.

JOHN. Her, her eyes are fascinating!

MRS. BUCHANAN. Goodness, yes, disturbing!

JOHN. No, quite lovely, I think. They're never the same for two seconds. The light keeps changing in them, like, like—a running stream of clear water . . .

MRS. BUCHANAN. They have a demented look!

JOHN. She's not demented, Mother.

MRS. BUCHANAN. *Ha!* You should see her in the Square when she feeds the birds. (*John laughs a little.*) Talks to them, calls them! "Here, birds, here, birds, here, birdies." Holding out her hand with some scraps of bread! —huh! —Son, your hair is still damp. It's lucky that Mother peeped in. Now let me rub those curls dry. —My boy's such a handsome boy, and I'm so proud of him! I can see his future so clearly, such a wonderful future! I can see the girl that he will marry! A girl with every advantage, nothing less will do!

JOHN. A girl with money?

MRS. BUCHANAN. Everything, everything! Intelligence, beauty, charm, background—yes! Wealth, wealth, too! It's not to be sneezed at, money, especially in the wife of a young doctor. It takes a while for a doctor to get established, and I want you to take your time and not make any mistakes and go a long, long, long, long way—further, much further than your dear father, although he hasn't done badly. . . . Yes, Mother can see her future daughter-in-law! —Healthy! Normal! Pretty!

JOHN. A girl like all the others?

MRS. BUCHANAN. Superior to the others!

JOHN. And sort of smug about it?

MRS. BUCHANAN. Oh, people have to be slightly smug sometimes. A little bit snobbish, even. People who have a position have to hold it, and my future daughter-in-law, my coming daughter—she'll have the sort of poise that only comes with the very best of breeding and all the advantages that the best background can give her.

JOHN. She won't be tiresome, will she?

MRS. BUCHANAN. Heavens, no! How could she?

JOHN. I've met some debutantes in Baltimore that found, somehow, a way of being tiresome . . .

MRS. BUCHANAN. Just wait till you meet the right one! I have

already met her, in my dreams! Oh, son, how she will adore you!

JOHN. More than she does herself?

MRS. BUCHANAN. She'll worship the ground you walk on.

JOHN. And her babies, how will they be?

MRS. BUCHANAN. Healthy! Normal!

JOHN. Not little pink and white pigs! With ribbons around their tails?

MRS. BUCHANAN. Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho! Your babies, my son's babies, pigs?! Oh, precious! I see them, I know them, I feel their dear little bodies in my arms! My adorable little grandchildren. Little pink things for the girl. Little blue things for the boy. A nursery full of their funny little toys. Mother Goose illustrations on the wallpaper, and their own wee little table where they sit with their bibs and their silver spoons, just so high, yes, and their own little chairs, their tiny straightback chairs and their wee little rockers, ho, ho, ho! —And on the lawn, on the enormous, grassy, shady lawn of the—Georgian, yes, *Georgian* mansion, not Greek revival, I'm tired of Greek revival! —will be their swing, their shallow pool for goldfish, their miniature train, their pony—oh, no, not a pony, no, no, not a pony! —I knew a little girl, once, that fell off a pony and landed on her head! *Goodness, she grew up to be almost as odd as Miss Alma! (At this point a dim spot of light appears on Miss Alma standing rapily before a window frame at the other side of the stage. A strain of music is heard.)*

JOHN. Miss Alma has asked me over next Monday night!

MRS. BUCHANAN. Oh, I knew it, trying to rope you in!

JOHN. She says there's to be a club meeting at the Rectory. A little group of young people with interests in common.

MRS. BUCHANAN. Oh, yes, I know, I know what they have in common, the freaks of the town! Every Southern town has them and probably every Northern town has them, too. A certain little group that don't fit in with the others, sort of outcast people that have, or imagine they have, little talents for this thing or that thing or the other—over which they make a big fuss among themselves in order to bolster up their poor little, hurt little egos! They band together, they meet at each other's houses once a week, and make believe they're disliked and not wanted at other places because they're special, superior—gifted! . . . Now your curls are all dry! But let me feel your footsies, I want to make sure the footsies are dry, too, I bet anything they're not, I bet they're damp!